

Connecticut Public Transportation Commission
Minutes of August 1, 2013

ConnDOT Headquarters, Conference Room A
Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Attendance: Members: Kevin Maloney, Richard Schreiner, Mort Katz, Alan Sylvestre, Yvonne Loteczka, Robert Rodman, Russ St. John, Ed McAnaney. **Ex-officio members:** Fred Riese (DEEP). **ConnDOT staff:** Michael Sanders, Dennis King, Sherry Osterling, Jim Stutz, Kathy Martocchio. **Guests:** Danielle Herbert, Terry Hall, Stephen Troster.

Chairman Maloney called the meeting to order at 1:36 p.m. The minutes of the meeting of July 11 were approved as written.

Comments from the Public

Terry Hall again expressed his support for the extension of Shore Line East service to Westerly, Rhode Island and noted that a few weeks ago a Shore Line East train did run to Westerly because of an Amtrak train that had mechanical difficulties. Terry also mentioned that the debate about Amtrak funding levels is continuing in Washington. He believes that situation will probably come down to a continuing resolution which will maintain Amtrak funding at current levels for the near term future.

Reports from Operating Entities

Rick Schreiner mentioned that HART will be holding three public hearings next week on a general fare increase. The hearings in Danbury, Bethel and New Milford will solicit public input on an increase in the base fare from \$1.25 to \$1.50, a level which would match the base fares of the Milford and Norwalk Transit Districts.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Maloney gave the schedule for the fall public hearings and named the moderators for each. The first hearing will be in Orange at the Town Hall on September 18 with Rick Schreiner moderating. The second hearing is September 24 in New Milford, also at the Town Hall. Fred Riese will moderate that hearing.

The Commission will hold a hearing at the Enfield Town Hall on October 15 with Mort Katz moderating. The final fall hearing will be October 22 at New London City Hall. Kevin will moderate in New London.

Featured Speaker

Michael Sanders, ConnDOT Administrator for Transit and Ridesharing, provided a detailed update on the CTfastrak project. Mike observed that a current Federal theme in transit is "think rail, use bus", which he says is a fitting theme for the CTfastrak project because of the attributes of the new service.

The New Britain Busway concept grew out of the Hartford West Corridor Major Investment Study of 1997-1999. It proved to be the most effective option at diverting trips off Interstate 84. Sanders noted that *CTfastrak* will provide enhanced connections to Waterbury and the Waterbury Branch of Metro-North, to the Springfield Line rail service and to the new Springfield-to-Boston passenger rail service when that goes into operation. The extra mobility provided by the busway may allow some households to downsize from two cars to one. Also, the incentive to promote transit-oriented development at the stations along the corridor is a big asset of *CTfastrak*. The busway, in combination with the multi-purpose trail which will run alongside it from New Britain to Newington Junction, will help foster walkable and bicycle-friendly communities.

Sanders noted that a typical new fixed guideway transit system has a gestation period of 14 years from concept to completion. The New Britain Busway will be just a little longer than this but reasonably close to the average. Currently, construction is 40% completed.

Thirty-eight new hybrid buses will be purchased to the *CTfastrak* service. Including buses from other routes which will enter and exit the busway along its route, a total of 80 buses will operate on the busway making an aggregate of 600 trips per day. The buses used exclusively on the busway will have a distinctive color scheme and will be articulated buses. The eleven stations along the busway will be outdoor stations but will provide shelter for riders.

CTfastrak will offer frequency, flexibility and one-seat rides. Buses will run every 4-5 minutes, a much more frequent service than would have been possible with trains. New routes serving Buckland Hills, Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and Waterbury, among other locations, will connect to the busway.

Variable message signs will be installed at *CTfastrak* stations to inform riders of arriving buses. An automatic vehicle location system will be implemented later which will allow the message signs to also display the times of each bus's arrival. Fare payment will be done before boarding the buses so there will be no lines at the farebox. Riders will simply show proof of payment to the driver. Sanders said that smart card systems being implemented elsewhere still have bugs but we will use this technology eventually. Smart phone payment applications will also be employed.

Sanders cited the air quality benefits from emissions reductions on the highways. Also the cars still on Interstate 84 will experience an estimated 11% increase in speed which will further reduce emissions. A 100-200 vehicle per hour reduction in traffic volumes is enough to make a difference in traffic flow.

In addition to the construction of 9.4 miles of roadway surface and the 11 stations along the busway, five miles of retaining wall need to be constructed and one mile of active Amtrak rail line needs to be relocated. Sanders noted that ConnDOT paid Amtrak \$17,000,000 for a permanent easement along the corridor from Newington Junction to Hartford.

A buses-only ramp off Route 72 in New Britain will provide access to the western end of the busway. At the New Britain station, 100 solar panels will provide 300 kilowatts of electricity. Sanders noted that some areas of the busway have already been paved.

The Flatbush Avenue intersection at New Park Avenue in West Hartford is the most congested intersection in all of West Hartford. Cars frequently stop on the tracks on Flatbush Avenue while waiting to clear that intersection. The new grade-separated bridge on Flatbush Avenue will improve safety. The concrete for the bridge has begun to be poured. The new bridge is expected to open in December at which time the old crossing of the tracks at Flatbush Avenue will be closed.

The busway alignment will weave in and out of the Interstate 84 supports in the vicinity of Capitol Avenue. Just east of there, the new Broad Street Bridge is scheduled to open on October 1, 2013, in time for the Hartford Marathon, which crosses that bridge. Sanders mentioned there is interest in running a 15K race event in the spring. This distance happens to be equivalent to 9.4 miles, the length of the busway. Planning for this event, which would run along the busway and its multi-use trail, is being coordinated with the Hartford Marathon organization.

Express buses from Cheshire, Bristol and Waterbury will access the busway in New Britain to complete their routes into Hartford. The ultimate terminus for all buses into downtown Hartford will be the re-opened Isle of Safety next to the Old State House. The City of Hartford is responsible for the Isle of Safety restoration, with a completion date of September 30, 2014 specified.

Before CT*fastrak* service begins, a service plan, an operations plan and a marketing and outreach plan will be developed. Sanders described each of these briefly as follows:

- Service Plan: a living plan which can be altered to serve new businesses. There will be a public hearing on the draft service plan in mid-October.
- Operations Plan: covers items including dispatch, maintenance, security cameras, drivers, and snow removal.
- Marketing and Outreach Plan: will have components for both before and after opening day.

Regarding the Operations Plan issue of snow removal, Sanders mentioned that the department will purchase six industrial grade snow blowers for snow removal. However, for significant sections of the corridor, snow removal for major winter storm events will involve dump trucks and loaders since the presence of the adjacent Amtrak line or some other neighbors precludes simply blowing the snow off the corridor onto adjacent properties.

Service on the busway will operate from 4:30 am to 1:30 am, or 21 hours per day, seven days a week. A project field office is located at 430 New Park Avenue in West Hartford. Sanders pointed to coordination with CCSU on multiple aspects of the project including outreach, marketing and graphics.

In response to a question concerning Flower Street in Hartford, Sanders said that street has already been closed to cars and will remain closed. It will remain open to pedestrians until

October when an alternate pedestrian route via Broad Street will become available. Regarding the new Broad Street bridge, rail clearance under that bridge is being improved from 16' 9" to 18' 9".

In response to other busway-related questions from Commission members, Sanders noted the following points:

- The busway will provide opportunities for buses to pass at each station.
- All 38 new *CTfastrak*-dedicated buses will be hybrid buses. As an aside, 10-15% of the CT Transit Hartford fleet is now comprised of hybrid buses.
- Joint fares and fare compatibility between CT Transit buses, including *CTfastrack*, and the Springfield Line rail service are envisioned. There may be a Uniticket system set up between CT Transit and the rail service.
- Should a second bus rapid transit (BRT) service corridor be pursued, it would be the corridor to Buckland Hills and Vernon. With the HOV lanes already in place along Interstate 84, this corridor would be much less expensive to construct than the New Britain Busway was.
- ConnDOT and the New Britain Parking Authority plan to work out an agreement either for joint tickets/ parking passes or to set aside an allotment of spaces for *CTfastrak* riders at the downtown New Britain parking garage just south of the busway station.

Moving on to several questions on other topics, Sanders said that no revenue loss is anticipated from the new CT Transit 90 minute bus passes which replace the old transfers. When Greater Bridgeport Transit instituted a similar program several years ago, it saw ridership go up significantly.

CT Transit has returned the two hydrogen fuel cell buses it had been leasing. When ClearEdge announced it would no longer support the UTC fuel cell buses, CT Transit turned in the keys to them. This leaves CT Transit with the one fuel cell bus (#701) that it owned outright. CT Transit will be upgrading the battery on bus #701 and getting a better hydrogen recharging plant at the Hartford Division facility.

ConnDOT had just received Bond Commission approval for the funds for a new bus storage and maintenance facility for the Windham Region Transit District. That project will be going out to bid this month or next. The design is already complete.

New Business

Danielle Herbert of Way To Go Connecticut introduced herself and mentioned that her organization had just begun operating in Enfield as of July 4.

Chairman Maloney adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.